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CIA in Strange Roles

Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota has renewed arguments for more effective congressional supervision of the Central Intelligence agency. His proposals, like others in the past, are opposed by officials in the executive department of government and by some congressional leaders. However, two new disclosures of questionable CIA activities give special relevance to the issue.

First came the embarrassing revelation that a supposedly academic training project of Michigan State university in South Vietnam a few years ago included at least five secret agents of the CIA. This has weakened international belief in the independent and nonpolitical character of American university programs abroad.

Second is the role of the CIA in a libel case brought in federal court in Baltimore by an Estonian emigrant. This involves CIA interference in political activities of Estonian groups in the United States and Canada.

Erik Heine, an Estonian who had the reputation of being an anti-communist "freedom fighter," sued another Estonian, Juri Raus, for libel, charging that he spread the word that Heine was a secret Soviet agent. Defense attorneys filed an affidavit from a deputy director of CIA saying the CIA had ordered Raus (one of its secret operatives) to make these statements. This fact alone, contends the defense, prevents Heine from being entitled to a court trial of the charges against Raus. No proof, evidence or additional testimony of any kind is required, the defense argues, and under previous court decisions this contention may prove legally sound.

In other words, the CIA may well have the legal right to declare a person a communist agent without the accused having any hearing in court as to the truth of the charges. Apparently the CIA could use this power against an American citizen as well as against an Estonian. And if the CIA could move to influence the internal political activities of Estonians in this country, could it not likewise interfere in domestic American politics?

The CIA may or may not be correct as to Heine's Soviet connections, but the disquieting fact is that he is not being permitted to defend himself in court. The CIA has judged him guilty on secret evidence.

Referring to the Michigan university and Heine cases, Senator McCarthy says the informal congressional group supposed to provide liaison with the CIA "either doesn't know about them or it has tolerated them." A few senior members of the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations committees say they keep watch on CIA activities. McCarthy says the Senate Foreign Relations committee at least should have representation in this group, but this request has been denied. Previously McCarthy has advocated a special, official joint congressional watchdog committee on the CIA. The public would have greater confidence in CIA if such a committee was established.